

WINTER QUARTERS

Carbon County

Mining
Class 3

Pleasant Valley was a luxuriant spot in the 1870's, settlers' cabins dotted the valley floor and the cattle grew fat on the lush grass. Then coal was discovered about 1875. In 1877 a small mine was opened on the western slopes of the valley and coal was transported over a narrow mountain road to several towns in northern Sanpete County. The winter that year came early and severe, stranding the miners in the coal pit. Because of their ordeal they named the little camp Winter Quarters.

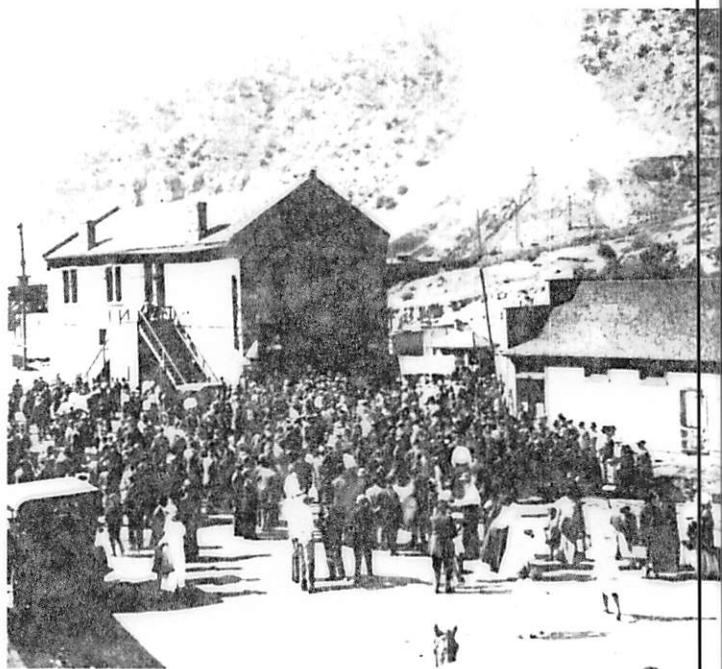
As Utah's first commercial coal mine developed, numerous miners were attracted and soon a thriving town was established. In 1877-79, in order to move the coal more efficiently, the Utah and Pleasant Valley Railroad was built from Springville to Winter Quarters and Scofield.

The Utah Fuel Company took over the mine and town, which became a subsidiary of the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad in 1882. Peak activity was reached in 1900; several hundred men were in the mines, in shifts, and with their families numbered between 12-1800. The mine was considered the safest coal mine in the region, free from gases which plagued other coal workings. However, on May 1, 1900, an errant spark touched off the finely dispersed haze of coal dust deep in the mine, which exploded throughout the mine. One hundred men were killed outright and the poisonous gas afterdamp killed another 99 in one of history's worst coal mine disasters. The town boarding house, church, school and barns were cleared out to receive and identify victims. Every casket in Salt Lake City, plus a carload from Denver, were brought to town. One hundred and fifty bodies were buried in Scofield and two funeral trains took the remaining caskets to various other places in Utah and surrounding states.

Although a pall of sorrow shrouded the camp for many years, the mines continued operating till 1928. The coal became suitable only for inexpensive locomotive fuel till finally the long underground transporting costs doomed the mine. By 1930, many houses had been moved to Scofield, and Winter Quarters was vacant.

The ghostly remains are few, the ruins of a large stone store built by Italian masons looms over several foundations and the old railroad grade.

References: 21, 22, 63, 72.



Winter Quarters was caught celebrating Pioneer Day, July 24, 1914.

UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Not much is left of Winter Quarters, July 24, 1971.

